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ABSTRACT

Though each community college has its own unique identity based on location, they all share the common commitments to (1) a comprehensive educational program; (2) teaching; (3) lifelong learning; (4) serving its community as a community-based educational institution; (5) workforce training and re-training for business and industry; and (6) open, accessible, equitable admissions for all students. These goals are achieved through the implementation of programs such as the Baccalaureate Transfer Program, Career Education Program, Work Force Training Program, Adult and Continuing Education Program, and the International Education Program. The impact of the United States community college continues to rise due to its wide accessibility and its provision of valuable services such as work force training. Support for community colleges continues to increase, with an even greater expansion expected into the 21st century, affirming their roles as leaders of higher education. They will play key roles in this high technology era as major drivers on the nation's information highway. One major concern, however, is the lack of financial resources to meet the challenges for the future. The State of Illinois Community College System has developed a strategic plan for a successful future. With plans such as these, American community colleges are ready to continue to meet future challenges and serve their communities. (YKH)

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AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGES--

LEADING THE WAY TO THE FUTURE

By Robert L. Mees

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AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGES--LEADING THE WAY TO THE FUTURE

The American community college which has served the nation for nearly 100 years is continuing to assume a leadership position in the educational system in the United States. Combining the characteristics of public high schools, private junior colleges, and four-year colleges and universities, the community college has developed its own identity and assumed a leadership role in education in the United States.

It is difficult for educators to generalize about community colleges in America. Each community college has its own unique identity based upon the culture and geographic area it serves. However, American community colleges do have much in common. Most public community colleges offer three types of programs: college baccalaureate transfer, career education (vocational-technical), and community service, which includes adult continuing education and training/re-training for business and industry.

For the purpose of this discussion, the community college is defined as a publicly supported, regionally accredited institution of higher education. The highest degree awarded by the community college is the associate's degree. In addition to the two-year associate of arts, associate of science, and associate of applied science degrees, one-year certificates are awarded for many career education programs. Most financial support for these institutions comes from public tax dollars. Community colleges primarily serve commuter students since most community colleges do not have residential facilities (Vaughan, 1995, p.2).

Today, there are approximately 1,100 community colleges in the United States that enroll over 10 million students annually. The community colleges enroll 44 percent of the undergraduates in the United States and 50 percent of all first-time freshmen. With the emphasis on open admissions and accessibility, community colleges serve many students who could not continue their education otherwise. Approximately 47 percent of all minorities in college attend community colleges while over half of higher education students with disabilities attend public community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 1996).

The Community College Mission

The community college mission is to provide educational programs and services to the region it serves. How each community college achieves its mission may vary considerably. Some colleges may put more emphasis on transfer programs while others may stress career education programs. Most community college missions are shaped by the following components:

1. A commitment to a comprehensive educational program.
2. A commitment to teaching.
3. A commitment to lifelong learning.
4. A commitment to serving its community as a community-based educational institution.
5. A commitment to work force training and re-training for business and industry.
6. A commitment to serving all members of the community with an open admissions policy that offers accessibility and equal and fair treatment for all students (Vaughan, 1995, p.3).

Implementation of the Community College Mission

A commitment to a comprehensive educational program, teaching, lifelong learning, serving the community, work force training/re-training and serving students with an open admissions policy that offers accessibility and equal and fair treatment for all students has little meaning unless the community college develops effective educational activities, courses, and programs. The community colleges in the United States achieve their mission by giving meaning to these commitments through the following programs, courses, activities, and services.

Baccalaureate Transfer Program. Students enrolled in the baccalaureate transfer program may pursue the first two years of the baccalaureate degree in any curriculum normally offered at any four-year college or university. Students completing the requirements for the Associate of Arts and the Associate of Science degrees may enter four-year institutions at the junior level. Most baccalaureate transfer programs include a general education core of classes consisting of coursework in communication, arts and humanities, social and behavorial sciences, and mathematics and science. Community college leaders realize that both courses and students transfer, so it is extremely important that the transfer program at the community college be articulated closely with the college or university to which the student intends to transfer.

Career Education Program. The career education program (vocational-technical education) has been an important part of the community college curriculum from the beginning. This program prepares students for employment in semi-professional occupations related to business, industry, health, and public service. These programs of study are usually developed with the assistance of advisory committees and on the basis of survey information identifying work place needs. Both certificate and degree programs are offered at most community colleges. Most certificate programs require one year of study while degree programs require two years of study.

Career programs prepare students for employment or advancement in over 200 occupational fields. Two-year Associate in Applied Science degrees and certificates are offered in Agriculture

Production & Management, Conservation & Natural Resources, Horticulture, Fashion Merchandising, Financial Services, General/Miscellaneous Marketing & Management, Hospitality Services, Insurance Marketing, International Business, Real Estate, Travel & Tourism, Advertising, Commercial Photography, Graphic/Commercial Arts, Journalism/Mass Communications/Public Relations, Radio & TV Broadcasting, Visual & Performing Arts, Agricultural Mechanization, Aircraft Mechanics, Auto Mechanics, Electrical/Electronic Installation/Repair, Heating/Air Conditioning/Refrigeration, Industrial Maintenance, Small Engine & Miscellaneous Repair, Information Processing, Upholstery, Watch/Clock/Jewelry Repair, Accounting, Computer Operations/Data Processing, Secretarial Services, Dental Services, Diagnostic Technologies, Emergency Medical Services, Health Aide, Health Facilities/Supplies Administration, Interpreter Preparation/Communication Disorders, Magnetic Resonance Imaging, Medical Lab Assistant, Medical Office Assistant, Mental Health, Nuclear/Radiologic Technologies, Nurse Assisting, Registered Nursing, Practical Nursing, Ophthalmic Services, Pharmacy Services, Physical/Occupational/Rehabilitation Therapy, Physician Assistant, Renal Dialysis, Respiratory Therapy, Surgical/Operating Room Technician, Veterinary Tech/Assistant, Pilot/Aviation Services, Rail/Water Transportation, Truck Driving/Equipment Operator, Brick Masonry, Carpentry/Construction Trades, Electrical, Plumbers/Pipefitters, Culinary Arts, Architecture/Civil/Construction Engineering, Automated Manufacturing/Robotics, Biotechnology, Chemical/Hazardous Materials, Computer-Aided Design, Drafting, Electronic/Electromechanical, Environmental Control, Graphic & Printing, Industrial Production, Mechanical Engineering, Mining & Petroleum, Nuclear Power, Precision Metalwork, Quality Control, Telecommunications, Child Care, Clothing & Textiles, Cosmetology Services, Criminal Justice/Corrections/Civil Defense, Fire Protection, Funeral/Mortuary Science, Home & Interior Design, Homemakers' Aide/Services, Human Services/Social Work, Legal Assisting, Library Science, Parks, Recreation, Leisure & Fitness, Public Administration, and Teacher Aide.

Work Force Training Program. Community colleges are key players in providing training for the work force of the future. Teaming up with business and industry, community colleges train and re-train thousands of employees each year. Due to the demand for these services, many community colleges have created special offices (centers for business and industry) to meet this need. Some of the educational programs and services provided by these centers are as follows:

1. Customized training programs geared to specific business and industry needs.

2. The delivery of on- and off-campus training for managers, supervisors, and operators.

3. Special needs projects for companies and governmental agencies.

4. Staff training and professional development training for educational institutions and school systems.

5. Employment training for unemployed or underemployed adults in order to improve their job skills and to assist them in seeking employment.

6. Identifying and developing educational programs needed for emerging occupations for a business.

7. The assessment of employees' work skills and aptitudes.

8. Providing continuing education for professionals working in career fields such as nursing, cosmetology, etc.

9. Providing internships in a business setting for students to develop their skills in their chosen fields.

10. The coordination, planning and implementation of conferences, seminars, and workshops for businesses, organizational groups, governmental agencies, etc.

These community college training and re-training centers can help businesses and industries to improve staff morale, increase productivity, diminish errors, provide a more effective management team, provide a better informed sales force, and plan research and activities that promote overall improvement of the organization. With the anticipated increase in domestic and global competition, work force training will evolve as one of the major community college missions.

Adult and Continuing Education Program. Community colleges also offer a variety of adult education courses in vocational and technical training, homemaking, personal development, and health and safety. Most of these classes are offered one evening a week for a ten- or twelve-week period. In addition, most of these classes are offered at convenient locations throughout a community college district to make these classes very accessible to students.

Community colleges also offer other services for adults, such as basic reading classes; pre-General Education Development (GED) classes; GED classes; job seeking skills classes; how to succeed in college classes; employability skills training; study skills classes; work place, volunteer, and family literacy; and adult secondary education.

International Education Program. Community colleges have always placed a lot of emphasis on international education programs. Most colleges offer a wide range of international education opportunities for students and the community. Study abroad programs, faculty and administrator exchanges, short-term travel/study programs, special lectures, international exhibits, internationalized curriculum programs, special courses, and exchanges of learning resources are some of the areas where community colleges have focused on international education. As community-based institutions of higher learning, community colleges have long been aware of global changes and their impact on American society. Community colleges also recognize that the world is not out *there*, but it is *here*, in the classroom for the students and communities they serve. American community colleges have realized that they have to develop a globally and multiculturally competent citizenry (American Council on International Intercultural Education and The Stanley Foundation, 1994).

The Community College Impact in the United States

The American community college system has had a tremendous impact on education and life in general in the United States this past century. This rise in the community college system can be attributed to many factors, but most importantly it has been accomplished because community colleges serve the needs of the community, respond to the needs of the community, offer a diverse curriculum, and have opened the doors of higher education to all segments of society. Today community colleges enroll more women than men, large numbers of ethnic and racial minorities, older adults, and practically anyone else who can benefit from attending the "people's college," a term used to describe today's community college in the United States (Vaughan, 1995, p.28).

People have attended community colleges for a variety of reasons. Some students attend to obtain an associate's degree to transfer to a four-year college or university; others enroll to earn technical degrees, to prepare for job entry, to upgrade their career or skills, to develop basic remedial skills, and for personal interests. Many are the first member of their families to enroll in higher education. These students tend to be older, have family and job responsibilities, and attend college part-time.

Community colleges confer more than 400,000 degrees each year, and that is only one important measure of their impact in the United States. Student goal attainment and satisfaction, job placement rates, and employer satisfaction are very high for community college students.

The community colleges have also emerged as the leader in work force training. Spurred by global competitiveness, the issue of work force readiness has emerged as a high priority among business leaders and government officials at both the state and national levels. Work force training has traditionally been a strong suit among community colleges, but in the past few years this has increased dramatically in number, flexibility, and scope as a response to market need. Today, the American Association of Community Colleges estimates that 90% of its member colleges are involved in the business of training workers for specific companies, rather than just teaching traditional classes. Throughout the country, community colleges are forming partnerships with business and industry in training and re-training the workforce. This reputation of being responsive and flexible has been a key factor in this exceptional growth in this area. Many educational and government leaders see this growth as a natural extension of the community college's mission to serve the local community (Moriarty, 1996).

The proven success of the community college student has also led business and industry to these partnerships with community colleges. This also has ramifications in other economic and community development areas. The availability of a trained work force is a key factor when determining a new industry location, and often customized training makes the difference in that final decision. Furthermore, community colleges are known for flexibility, quality and affordable instruction, and a track record of meeting the needs of students and members of their community at-large.

State social service agencies can also attest to the success of the community college in making a difference in the lives of the neediest citizens in the United States. For many years, community colleges in America have promoted self-worth, self-sufficiency, self-empowerment, and success for displaced workers, welfare recipients, and other people who have had problems in establishing themselves in life (Moriarty, 1996).

At the federal level, community college support has never been higher. At a recent National Legislative Seminar sponsored by ACCT (Association of Community College Trustees) and AACC (American Association of Community Colleges), U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley referred to the coming decades as not only the "information age but the community college age." Similar comments have been made by President Bill Clinton, Secretary of Labor Robert Reich and other key congressional leaders (Kent, 1996).

Among the national news media, interest in community colleges appears to be growing everyday. With the issue of college costs and rising tuition heating up in terms of public concern and news media scrutiny, community colleges are reaping significant benefits due to their affordable tuition rates and cost-efficiency. Great attention and news coverage has also come from the excellent job being done with work force training and re-training by community colleges.

The Community College and the 21st Century

As we look forward to the 21st century, the community colleges should continue to expand their leadership role as an institution of higher education. In approaching the year 2000, educational leaders must build on this unparalleled success in the past and be prompt in identifying changes and in developing the strategies that will ensure that identified crucial needs will be met in the future. Such an approach will keep community colleges in a leadership position in higher education both in the United States and around the world.

In order to continue this incredible success and growth, community colleges must be sure that their institutional goals are consistent with student and community goals. Community colleges, as open-access institutions, must be extremely sensitive to the needs of students and consider those needs in relation to all aspects of teaching and learning. Furthermore, as the population in the United States continues to grow and become more diverse, the community colleges should be ready to meet those challenges relevant to this diversity.

Community colleges will also continue to expand their leadership role in the training and re-training of the work force for business and industry, not only for the communities they serve but for the world. Community college leaders must recognize the fact that their institutions are models for other countries and be sensitive to this fact by working with national and international leaders to better understand and define the role that community colleges can play in countries that traditionally have limited higher education to a narrower segment of society.

With the advent of the high-technology era, community colleges will also be a major driver on the nation's information highway. All the new technology (distance learning, telecourses, computerized instruction, etc.) will affect how students learn, how teachers teach, and how management organizes and leads. The new technologies will also have a tremendous influence on the work place and the way the community colleges train and re-train the workforce. In addition, the movement toward individualized learning will be accelerated with the introduction of all of the electronic media, and this will most likely de-emphasize the importance business and industry has placed on baccalaureate degrees in the past (Vaughan, 1995, p.38). In other words, certificates and associate degrees will be all that is needed for many jobs in business and industry.

One of the major concerns of the community college leaders as we approach the 21st century is the lack of financial resources to meet the needs and challenges for the future. These institutions are constantly being asked to take on new and demanding tasks with very little additional resources. The competition for tax dollars will continue to increase into the next century as will the competition for special grants at both the state and federal levels. It is also unlikely that student tuition increases will provide adequate increases to meet this demand, so community colleges will have to be more efficient in using their resources in the future as well as being more selective in choosing what issues and problems the college commits its resources to resolving.

The imminence of a millennial year has stimulated an abundance of commissions organized to assess trends in community college functions and support. State-level groups have been organized in many states along with a national Commission on the Future of Community Colleges and the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act.* Each of these commissions has issued reports predicting the need for enhanced educational services and an even greater emphasis on the importance of maintaining comprehensive, high-quality community colleges that would serve a broad range of clients as we approach the 21st century (Cohen and Brawer, 1996, pp. 417-418).

The State of Illinois Community College System, which is one of the largest in the United States, has recently developed a strategic plan for the future. The plan, which is entitled "Vision 2000--Charting a Course for the Future," was developed with the input of hundreds of Illinois citizens. Government leaders and educational leaders will serve as a guide for the community college system in responding to the educational challenges of the future. This plan advocates the need to stretch the minds of faculty members, administrators, trustees, presidents, and students so that there is more room for acceptance and development of new ideas and knowledge. The Vision Statement for this plan envisions the community college as a place where teachers take pride in teaching, students take pride in learning, and the focus is on quality and excellence; a passionate thirst for new knowledge is instilled, both in students and in staff; society's values are shaped and revised, and leadership, integrity, self-discipline, self-motivation, humanity, dignity, pride, and caring are purposefully taught and modeled; the experiences of students are directed toward developing each of them as informed, responsible, and contributing citizens and employees; the responsibility of accountability is accepted eagerly; expressions and manifestations of bigotry, prejudice, and denigration of character are not tolerated; no individual is considered to be inherently more important than another, and each is provided with an equal opportunity to achieve

success; actions are focused on interdependence, collaboration, and inclusiveness -- "community" in its broadest sense; communities are assisted in identifying and solving problems such as substance abuse, crime, child abuse, and a variety of conditions that undermine and destroy their very fiber; and the boundaries of our communities are extended to countries around the world, and international interdependence is nurtured. Guided by this vision and strengthened by this strategic plan, the Illinois Community College System, through its locally autonomous colleges, will provide the State of Illinois and the nation with their most productive supply of educated citizens as we move toward the 21st century (Illinois Community College Board, 1993).

The American community colleges have achieved great success during this past century by being accessible, flexible, adaptable, and creative in providing quality instruction to students and in providing important services to the communities they serve. Now these great institutions are in a position to play an even greater role in meeting the challenges for future, not only in the United States but throughout the world.

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